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ABSTRACT

A brief overview of the status, as of August 1990, of the 1990 decennial census conducted by the U.S. Department of Commerce is presented. Topics include: the recanvassing effort for following up on the census proper; the effects of reinstitution of unemployment benefits for all temporary census employees; completion of the initial interviewing phase of the post-enumeration survey; official delivery and subsequent correction of census counts for the purpose of apportioning the U.S. House of Representatives; and quality control checks designed to identify and enumerate addresses missing from the census master list. (TJH)

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ORAL STATEMENT OF

MICHAEL R. DARBY
UNDER SECRETARY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS
AND
ADMINISTRATOR, ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

BEFORE THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON POST OFFICE AND CIVIL SERVICE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CENSUS AND POPULATION

ON

STATUS OF THE 1990 CENSUS

AUGUST 8, 1990
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

It is a great pleasure to testify here in Anaheim at the 1990 American Statistical Association meetings on what we know about the 1990 census. If I may speak personally for a moment, my first professional meetings as a baby assistant professor were when the American Statistical Association met in Detroit in 1970. So, for me, it is an especially joyous occasion to see my academic career and period of public service combined here in one place.

Unfortunately, that means if we run over I shall have to excuse myself to deliver the annual economic outlook luncheon lecture in the next time slot, but that should not unduly interfere with our testimony on the status of the 1990 census because I have at the table here today the three principal operating officers of the Economics and Statistics Administration (or ESA) who directly handle various aspects of the 1990 census for us. The ESA works as a team, and although we all play two or three positions as need be, in general our areas of responsibility are clear: Barbara Everitt Bryant, Director of the Bureau

of the Census, has principal responsibility for the 1990 census. She is my good right arm, and on her largely rests the responsibility for the success of the census. Mark W. Plant, Deputy Under Secretary and Deputy Administrator of ESA, has principal responsibility for statistical policy and standards throughout ESA. Susanne H. Howard, Associate Under Secretary and Associate Administrator of ESA, has principal responsibility for administration, promotion, and outreach, including coordination of the efforts of the Under Secretary's Office with the variety of census outreach programs. Each has a big job and could exhaust your time and patience talking to you about his or her accomplishments and remaining challenges. Before I let Mark and Susy speak briefly to those issues, and before Barbara brings you up to date on the details of progress of the 1990 census, I will take the chief executive's prerogative of giving an overview of the 1990 census as a whole, and following with our response to some concerns which you, Mr. Chairman, expressed to me at our hearing in Austin, Texas.

Overview

First, the enumeration effort is not over. Even though we have completed non-response follow-up, and are nearly through field follow-up and the "Were You Counted?" campaign, we are actively recanvassing areas where our quality control program has identified problems, and we will shift workers in late September and October to recanvassing areas where discrepancies in housing counts are identified by local governments in our post-census local review. Only then will the enumeration be complete. However, based on what we know already, we remain confident that this census will be the best census count ever achieved.

Mr. Chairman, at this point it is necessary to digress and to temper our optimism by uttering a word of caution. As you know, the Congress just before its August recess reinstituted unemployment benefits for all temporary census employees. I can not go into detail about the full consequences of its action, since the Bureau is only just now working through those effects. I would be less than candid, however, if I did not alert the committee to the fact that the funds

necessary to carry out the requirements of this statute are currently fully committed to ongoing operations of the census, including the Housing Coverage Check, which I will describe briefly in a moment, and to other programs to assure adequate census coverage. As we work through the impact of this action, we will keep the committee informed of its consequences for the quality of the decennial census. We are hopeful that that quality will remain high, but there may be problems maintaining our intended levels of accomplishment.

Second, the initial interviewing phase of the post enumeration survey is virtually complete. There remain only a few thousand housing units to be contacted. We fully expect this operation to be completed literally within days. This exercise, which has been a standard part of the census since 1950, is particularly important this census because the results of the survey will play an important role in the Secretary's deliberations with respect to adjusting the census count.

Third, we are confident that, as we have always done, we will deliver numbers to the President for his transmission to the Congress which

will be the basis of apportioning the House of Representatives of the 103rd Congress. By the Stipulation entered into by the Commerce Department and the City of New York, et al., these numbers will include the statement that "The population counts set forth herein are subject to possible correction for undercount or overcount. The United States Department of Commerce is considering whether to correct these counts and will publish corrected counts, if any, not later than July 15, 1991." We will also deliver numbers to the several States within one year of census day in accordance with Public Law 94-171, and those numbers will be accompanied by the same caveat.

Housing Coverage Check

Mr. Chairman, in Austin you expressed considerable interest and strong concern as to what the Census Bureau was doing to add to our list of addresses any that may have been missed. I told you a good bit about our multiple safety net procedures and the great importance we place on local governments doing their key job of providing an independent check of our address list during the post-census local review. Today, I want to report that our quality control checks have

identified possible pockets of addresses missing from our master list. We have mobilized teams which are currently in the field checking whether to add housing units to our address list and, if so, enumerating the people who lived in those units on April 1st. We do not require additional funds for this Housing Coverage Check because these are people whom we always planned to enumerate and simply would be picking them up here instead of in other field operations.

Dr. Bryant will elaborate on this operation and the quality control that permitted us to localize areas in order to carry it out. I have also asked Dr. Bryant to clarify the frequency of "last resort" information in the overall data for occupied housing units, a topic which I fear our discussions in Austin left with more confusion than existed when they began.

Conclusions

Mr. Chairman, the dedicated staff of the Census Bureau, the hard working enumerators who have been our front-line troops in the conduct of the census, the citizens of this country who have done

their civic duty by completing their census forms -- all of these deserve credit for our success to date. No operation as massive as the census is without its problems. However, the Founding Fathers never said counting the population was going to be easy: they only said it was the heart of our democratic republic. We all have reason to be proud that, for the 20th time in our nation's history, we can look forward to the peaceful redistribution of political representation according to the distribution of our population.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank this subcommittee, and all members of Congress, for their support in this enterprise. By working together we are well on our way to completing a census of which we can all be proud.

Thank you.

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